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Republicans focus on northern Michigan economy

LANSING – Northern Michigan's economy would benefit from proposed legislation unveiled at a press conference in Gaylord today by Sens. Tony Stamas, Jason Allen and Michelle McManus.

The Northern Michigan Initiative package is designed to stimulate the economy in Northern Michigan and provide incentives to attract tourism and travel in the region.

The initiative includes the creation of a Great Lakes Recreational Pass, a multi-state/federal agreement allowing individuals to purchase one pass to visit select parks and forest recreation areas throughout Michigan and neighboring states. The pass would emulate the "Northwest Pass" created by a partnership between Oregon, Washington and the National Park Service.

"Joining forces with other Great Lake states and the federal government to create a multi-state recreational pass is overdue," said Stamas, R-Midland, sponsor of the bill. "This is a great idea and could do so much to help boost tourism in northern Michigan. This is just the sort of thing we need."

"Tourism is a focal point of northern Michigan's economy," said Allen, R-Traverse City. "This legislation will shine a light on all the natural wonders contained in our great state, helping to attract tourists and improve the business climate of northern Michigan."

Another element of the Northern Michigan Initiative would offer short line railroads a Single Business Tax credit of up to \$1,000 per mile for track maintenance expenditures.

"Short line railroads are critical to Michigan's transportation system," said Stamas, sponsor of the bill. "Because Michigan has two peninsulas, our businesses face unique transportation challenges. One of the most helpful things we can do to help northern Michigan businesses is ensure they have efficient, reliable and economic transportation options."

Another key component of the Northern Michigan Initiative includes targeting Community Development Block Grants to rural areas. Rural Michigan counties have an average unemployment rate of 8.1 percent.

"Our rural communities are just as important as our large cities," said McManus, R-Lake Leelanau. "We need to focus on decreasing unemployment across the whole state, especially in the rural areas where Michigan residents are being hard hit."

"Michigan has not positioned itself for economic recovery and growth. This is really showing in northern Michigan where the unemployment is even higher than the unacceptably high statewide average," said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "This legislation will give northern Michigan residents and businesses a better shot at taking advantage of opportunities for recovery. There's no silver bullet to make everything right, but by combining legislative initiatives with northern Michigan's work ethic, we'll see things turn around."

Northern Michigan Initiative legislation will be introduced in the coming weeks.

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